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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [TS](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S FAREWELL CALL WITH MINISTER OF DEFENSE

REF: A. TUNIS 1603
[1](#)B. TUNIS 1099

Classified By: AMBASSADOR WILLIAM HUDSON FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) SUMMARY: Ambassador's farewell call on Minister of Defense Morjane was marked by mutual appreciation for the strong bilateral military relationship and guarantees of its continuation. Morjane shared his views on the broader bilateral relationship, specifically political reform. Morjane said the MOD continues its review of the Status of Forces Agreement draft text and hopes to respond to the USG shortly. Morjane said Tunisia is considering how to increase its multilateral military engagement. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) On June 29, Ambassador made a farewell call on Minister of Defense Kamel Morjane. Ambassador noted that positive dialogue and excellent cooperation the Ministry has provided during his tenure and cited the success of training and exchange programs. Morjane said Tunisia was grateful for these opportunities and wants to continue this level of cooperation. "Our Ministry will continue in this same spirit of cooperation with your successor," said Morjane.

[1](#)3. (C/NF) POLITICAL ISSUES: Turning to the broader bilateral relationship, and referring to USG efforts to promote democratic reform, Morjane said that "some things are not in full agreement," but that mutual respect and confidence does exist. Morjane asked that the U.S. recall Tunisia is a young country and that it is still hard for some Tunisians to adjust to changing views, such as a multiparty system. He said that he hopes the U.S. will one day have a "better message" on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, which is the "only concern" Tunisian citizens have about the U.S.

[1](#)4. (C) SOFA: Morjane seized the opportunity to brief the Ambassador on the Ministry's progress on the SOFA draft text and clarify the status (Ref A). Morjane said that the Ministry is working with an Arabic version of the text, which needs to be reviewed by other parts of the government before a final English version is returned to the USG. Morjane said that the Ministry's changes "take into account your proposal and President Ben Ali's discussion of judicial issues with Secretary Rumsfeld." Noting "we have taken more time than I

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thought," Morjane said he hoped the Tunisian response would be ready in July, but that he could not promise anything.

[1](#)5. (C/NF) MULTILATERAL COOPERATION: The Ambassador urged Morjane to continue to strengthen its multilateral military cooperation and to take advantage of multilateral

opportunities. Morjane said "our will is there, but our means are limited." He added that Tunisia is reluctant to be involved in peacekeeping operations, such as in Darfur or the Western Sahara, where Tunisia may not appear to be a neutral party. Morjane said that Tunisia "has no political or fundamental problem" with NATO cooperation, and that Col. Habib Boughoula (currently in the Minister's office) will shortly become the Defense Attach in Brussels in charge of Tunisia's relationship with NATO.

¶6. (C/NF) COMMENT: Morjane, who clearly feels comfortable speaking freely, was particularly candid in his remarks. In addition to noting that Presidents Ben Ali and Bourguiba share the same ideology but have different styles, at one point he highlighted the strong personal relationships he had enjoyed with Israeli diplomats while working with the UN in Geneva. He also complimented the MOD's reputation as a strong organization in the Tunisia government, saying that other entities regularly turned to the Ministry for assistance with everything from humanitarian projects to protocol issues. This frankness further reinforces the impression that, although minister for less than a year, Morjane is part of President Ben Ali's inner circle (Ref B).
END COMMENT.
HUDSON